Community Council Suggestions
Regarding Student Stress on Campus

Assembled for use by Working Group on Student Stress

March 2016
To the Members of the Working Group on Student Stress:
Community Council has been engaged in a year-long conversation regarding student stress on campus. Because the exaggerated levels of stress experienced by many students on campus negatively impact their academic, social, and residential experience, we felt responsible for developing a shared sense of the root causes of this stress. As you will see from the following document, we believe that these causes are both real and wide-ranging, encompassing core aspects of a student’s identity, as well as mental health, racism, financial circumstances, and much more. The student, staff, and faculty members of Community Council worked individually and as a group to develop the attached list of changes/interventions that we believe could have lasting impact. We did not vote independently on each recommendation, but we did endorse the document as a whole by a simple majority vote. We respectfully ask that you consider these recommendations as you develop your own response to the President’s charge.

Sincerely,

Community Council
Recommendation

Because high levels of student stress exist on the Middlebury College campus;

Because students have demanded that SGA, Community Council, and the College Administration address these high levels of stress;

Because student stress must be addressed structurally by identifying the causes and contributing factors to stress;

Because student stress greatly impacts the academic and social environment at Middlebury College;

Because student stress is felt unequally across groups based on the overlap and intersection of various personal identities and the dynamics of power and privilege that exist on the Middlebury College campus;

Because President Laurie Patton has assembled Working Group on Student Stress for the precise purpose of addressing student stress;

... 

Community Council recommends that the Working Group on Student Stress considers this list of suggestions regarding student stress on the Middlebury College campus.*

*This list has been approved by a simple majority vote. Its purpose is to be as comprehensive and broad as possible. As a result, suggestions have not been voted on individually, and individual suggestions do not represent the opinion of every voting member on Community Council.
Brief Introduction: How do we think about student stress?

Sources:

- Ableism and Disability
- Academic daily experience (homework, classes, etc.)
- Academic long-term experience (choosing major, advising, registration, etc.)
- Athletics
- Classism
- Extracurriculars
- Financial circumstances
- Gender Identity
- Health
- Homophobia
- Mental health
- Parents
- Perfectionism/ fear of Failure
- Racism
- Relatives
- Romantic partners
- Sexism
- Sexual Assault/ other traumas

Big Picture Academics

1. “Differences in Dynamic & Power” distribution requirement
2. Work for cultural shift in the way Middlebury students think about grades (a B is not a failure, nor is a C). A lot of stress may be self-generated, and students should be encouraged to value their mental and physical health equally with a desire to excel academically.
3. Move the drop deadline to the fifth week (suggested by Natasha Chang)
4. Faculty:
   - Examine Faculty tenure and research/publishing process to see how it affects student stress.
   - Encourage faculty to emphasize “slow learning” approach by considering it in the tenure process.
   - Require faculty to produce syllabi on the first day of the semester. Some faculty members do not produce comprehensive syllabi, making it difficult for students to make informed decisions about workloads.
   - Encourage faculty to not only value sports commitments when accepting late assignments/missed class but also the commitments of work-study students, etc.
5. Add “reflection” and “slow learning” to Middlebury’s (learning) mission statement.
6. Create programs and spaces that bring faculty and students together in contexts beyond the classroom and office hours that are primarily focused on specific academic issues.
7. Enact option for students to get written feedback instead of grades.
8. Create increased community among majors: have each department plan major-
only events or dinners twice a semester (Political Science does this).
9. Enact "safe zone" in which all first-year students' grades are not recorded on transcripts (may replace grades with written reports or P/F).
10. Create a centralized job website to list all undergraduate research positions.
11. Talking about what the liberal arts is – the idea of learning for learning's sake – rather than looking at grades as a component piece. A love of learning is absent from this conversation (Sophomore Seminar in the Liberal Arts taught by Jonathan Miller-Lane is a great place to start).

**Academic Assignments**

12. Written policy of allowing extensions when assignments from various courses overlap / Exam times should be standardized and also minimized to avoid conflicts (4 exams in one day or week). Several faculty-members already have this policy, and will give extensions if a student is aware long in advance of conflicts with other assignments.
13. Encourage faculty to offer different forms of assessments offered.
14. Encourage faculty not to assign large amounts of readings (from PDF) unless they will allow laptops in class.

**Advising**

15. System of student-to-student advising that may include time management, general academic requirements, or major requirements.
16. Extend/advertise Yonna McShane's time management teaching.
17. Discuss First Year Seminar faculty having too many advisees; is there a better model for advising where there can be better fit, more flexibility and de-stress the faculty member? (Can also lighten the load on faculty).

**CCI**

18. Bring alumni to campus that followed more “normal” career paths, instead of high-achieving alumni in competitive sectors, reminding students that they can be happy and successful without working in highly-competitive atmosphere or having perfect grades.
19. Extend the CCI deadline; currently you have to know about a summer internship very early to get summer funding, which privileges certain types of internships and students (ex. Finance internships are earlier, while most non-profits do not accept interns until after the CCI deadline).
20. Increase funding opportunities. Currently, students may not receive CCI finding twice, which puts pressure on low-income students looking for summer internships and may drive them toward certain industries which offer paid internships.
   - Consider need-based funding opportunities.
Protocol around Marginalization & Discrimination
*All of these suggestions can be further discussed with the Bias Response Team

21. Teach faculty about protocol for learning differences; students have been denied accommodation in the past.
22. Expand the ADA office. Jodi Litchfield is very busy.
23. Train faculty to engage in conversation on issues of race, gender, socioeconomic status, learning styles, learning differences, disability, etc. and incorporate this into their teaching.
24. Address the unacceptable lack of elevators in academic buildings such as Munroe Hall and Warner Hall, and in residential buildings such as Battell and Pearson Hall.
25. Fund free winter sports gear rentals and passes: ice skates, downhill skis, snowshoes, Nordic skis, snowboards, toboggans/sleds
   o Not just winter sport opportunities but year-round sporting opportunities across socioeconomic statuses – road bikes, balls, vans for hikes, etc.

Community & Space

26. Rethinking McCullough (Roman Christiaens is heading this project and would be happy to discuss it).
   o Safe places for certain groups.
   o Student Org offices.
   o Having more spaces for the whole community to go.
27. Faculty Moth, possibly focusing on “mistakes.” The Moth is very popular and would allow faculty and students to interact in a more casual setting.
28. Improve the condition of common spaces in dorms (many are dimly lit, small, with old furniture; CRAs can help with this).
29. Increase the number of seminar classrooms with big circular desks/tables.
30. Turn 51 Main into a community center in town that is not only focused on purchasing food and drinks.

Transportation

32. Hire a full-time Transportation Director to work out of Sustainability Office to work on solving many of the transportation dilemmas on Middlebury’s campus. They can help create rideshares among students, staff, and faculty; manage ZipCar (and make it more accessible to students).
33. Allow students not associated with student orgs to rent College vehicles as long as they have a college license. Consider making College vehicles free instead of charging student orgs for them.
34. Create system where international students and students without cars can hire student drivers to take them places (extension of already existing student driver network).
35. Expand MiddRides hours to during the daytime to facilitate transportation on
campus and to nearby areas like Porter Hospital. This also decreases stress of Public Safety and injured students.

**Stress and Money**

36. Evaluate policies in which students on financial aid wish to take time off; ensure that their financial aid will be consistent and reliable.
37. Create policy where all student jobs must be posted in the online database; create student jobs of student-job CCI worker who can help place work-study people in the right jobs for their interests.
38. Increase transparency and communication to students on how to navigate financial aid – potentially through meetings with presentations outlining how the system works and what to expect over the four years at Middlebury, the training of senior students who understand the process to help younger students.
39. Laundry – update the laundry machines to improve environmental impact and efficiency, and reduce the cost per load of laundry.

**Calendar**

40. Build in one “surprise” no-class day per semester to gather and do something community-oriented.
41. Create a policy where students practicing non-normative (Jewish or Christian) holidays can officially opt to not participate in class for cultural or religious holidays (ex. part of Chinese New Year, or Ramadan).
42. “No homework weekends” once per semester.
43. Protected breaks: no homework can be assigned over fall break, spring break, etc. Tests and big projects cannot be due within three days of the first day back.

**De-Stressing Activities**

44. More advertisement of free meditation/massage sessions.
45. MiddDog: a program that coordinates faculty and staff that need dog walkers with willing students. “Ex. I play fetch with Jenna on Thursdays at 5:00.” A long-term purpose-oriented relationship with dogs is necessary.